

A Comparative Analysis of Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria (UBE) and the "Grundskola" Education Programme of Sweden

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Abstract *The formation of educational policies is complex by nature. The complexity owes not only to the fact that education is a sector where it is difficult to identify the underpinnings and their effects to be foreseen, but also to the diversity of interests that education represents for the different actors in society. In the dynamics of educational management, within the large context of a global quest for Education for All (EFA), the Nigerian UBE and the Swedish Grundskola programmes have a fundamental principle in common. Compared to other socio-economic sectors, educational development involves more difficult and multidimensional problems. Faced with financial constraints, governments in many countries are not able to meet the broad social demands without adopting restrictive measures within the education sector, while rationalising the use of allocated resources. Because there are too many actors, variables and the interrelations between these, the result of Education for All (EFA) with the Grundskola was successful perhaps, based on some of the issues discussed while that of the Nigerian Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme proved abortive.*

Introduction

The Universal Basic Education Programme in Nigeria and the "Grundskola" Education Programme of Sweden are situated within the large context of a global quest for Education for All (EFA). Both programmes have a fundamental principle in common, that is everybody must have access to equivalent education and both are comprehensive. Education has essentially been a social process in capacity building and maintenance of society since the creation of human beings. To cope with the changing realities and uncertainties of human life, education has been a weapon with which to equip the people to acquire relevant knowledge, skills and habits for surviving in the modern world. Herein the entire world has shown concerns for "Education for All" (EFA) since 1968 (Obayan, 2002).

It was a bold attempt to focus the resolve and resources of governments, international agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), teacher, parents, and communities on the need to improve educational opportunities everywhere. The highlight of the World Declaration on Education for All among other things includes: "...satisfying basic learning needs requires an expanded vision which encompasses, universalizing access and promoting equity, focusing on learning, broadening the means and scope of basic education, enhancing the environment for learning and strengthening partnership" (Bernard Van Leer Foundation Newsletter p.5). This assumption formed the springboard of the framework of Universal Basic Education (UBE) in Nigeria in 1999 and "Grundskola" in Sweden in 1998. Both programmes are situated within the large context of a global quest for Education for All (EFA). Both have one fundamental principle in common, that everybody must have access to equivalent education.

Differences on the Impact to Each Country

Nigeria is a signatory to the 1990 Jomtiem Declaration of Education for All. The Nigerian educational statistics of 1996 showed that only 14.1 million children are enrolled in primary schools out of the 21 million children of school going age (Federal Ministry of Education, 1999). As a response to EFA and the declaration, Nigeria repositioned its key role towards a new education vision by establishing the UBE programme which takes universal access to basic education as fundamental. This is in consonance with section 18(3) (a) of the 1999 Nigeria Constitution dealing with the fundamental principles of the state policy. It

states that: Government shall strive to eradicate illiteracy and to this end government shall as when practicable provide free, compulsory and universal primary education (Nigerian Constitution, section 18).

UBE is thus planned as the right to have one's basic learning needs met in various setting such as home, community, school, out-of-school educational, cultural and everyday life activities. It also involves various agents such as family, local and broader community, State Government, civil society such as local associations like rural cooperatives, Parents Teachers' Association etc.

In the same vein, the Grundskola of Sweden is also a nine-year compulsory education programme (primary and lower secondary). As the name is, the programme takes the form of a 9 year comprehensive schooling for children aged 7 to 16. It is provided in one-all-through compulsory phase school known as Grundskola. Many children receive their compulsory schooling from one and the same school. Grundskola is non-selective, full-time and co-educational.

The similarities between the two programmes lie in the fact that:

- Both are compulsory, free, comprehensive, and co-educational and everybody has access to equivalent education. The Swedish Education Act stipulates equal access to equivalent education for all children and young persons regardless of sex, geographical location and social and economic circumstances (Sou, 1997). Grundskola programme consists of compulsory and comprehensive schooling with "Sami-schools for "Sami"-speaking children (Sameskolan), special school which comprises ten grades for children with impaired sight and those who are deaf or partially deaf with secondary handicaps, compulsory school for those with learning difficulties and compulsory school for intellectually handicapped. This is called Sarskola (Skolverket, 2000). Thus the inclusive approach to education is full embedded in the programme.
- Like the Grundskola, the UBE programme consists of formal basic education encompassing the first 9 years of schooling for all children, nomadic education for school age children of cattle rearers and migrant fishermen and literacy and nonformal education for out-of-school children, youth and illiterate adults. The duration of the formal aspect of the programme is 9 years. The 9 years consists of the primary and junior/lower secondary education. For the UBE, the primary level is a six year course for children between ages six years and eleven plus and the junior secondary is a three year course for children between 12 years and 15 years. Each of these levels of education is received in a separate school.

Goals of the UBE and Grundskola Programme

The specific objectives of UBE in Nigeria as stipulated by the Federal Government of Nigeria include:

- Developing in the citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to its vigorous promotion;
- Providing free, compulsory, universal basic education for every Nigerian child of school-going age;
- Catering for drop-outs from the formal school system through improved relevant adult literacy programme;
- Catering for drop-outs and out-of-school children/adolescents through various forms of complementary approaches to the provision and promotion of basic education
- Ensure the acquisition of the appropriate levels of literacy, numeracy, manipulate and skills (FGN p.2)

Whereas, the goals of the Swedish Grundskola include to:

- impart knowledge and help pupils develop into responsible persons and members of the society (International Programme Office for Education and Training 1997). The document further stated that education involves:

- Passing on a cultural heritage values, traditions and language, knowledge from one generation to the next.
- That the school has the task of preparing pupils for living and working in society.
- It involves providing pupils with opportunities for taking initiative and responsibilities as “we” and creating the pre-conditions for developing their ability to work independently and solve problems (Outbuildings Department, 1996).

Summing up the major tasks of the Grundskola, it is evident that the programme aims at harmonious development of the children by stimulating them towards self development and personal growth. In the same vein, the UBE programme initiative is for acquisition of literacy, numeracy and skills for children. The programme is geared towards life-long learning which does not necessarily end with the formal aspect of the programme. This perhaps makes UBE differ significantly from the Grundskola

Content, Methodology and Organization

In Sweden, the Ministry of Education defines the underlying values, basic objectives and guidelines of the school system. Then the head of each school in consultation with teachers and other staff draw up a school plan which is based on the national objectives (Lewy, 1996). Municipalities are responsible for the implementation of national curriculum. It is the teachers, together with the children that establish learning goals bearing in mind the needs and circumstances of different groups of children.

In Nigeria, it is the Nigeria Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) that is responsible for curriculum development. However, the Ministry of education provides the guidelines and implementation strategies. Recently, the states created the state Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) which has been saddled with the responsibility of the control of the UBE programme. In Nigeria, the goals are already set out for teachers to work towards attaining them. Neither teachers nor pupils are seldomly involved in the drawing up the school plan to suit the needs of the locality.

In Sweden, the Grundskola education provides perspectives in all school subjects. The statutory curriculum consists of core or basic subjects. These are Swedish, English and Mathematics. These subjects are given prominence position in the subject time table. English is mandatory as the first compulsory foreign language. The teaching of English language begins at the third year or fourth year of the nine year programme. This varies from one municipality to the other. In the same vein, the core subjects of the UBE programmes in Nigeria include English language, Mathematics, Social Studies, General Science and Nigerian Language.

However, English language is taught in the school as a subject in first: three years of the formal schooling but it becomes the medium of instruction at the third year of schooling. Thereafter, it is the language of textbook, examination communication etc. The reason for this cannot be far fetched. This is because English is a lingua franca in Nigeria. It is unfortunate that there is a language policy in the UBE programme which stipulates that “The mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment should be used as the medium in the first three years”. The basis for this policy is rooted in the fact that it has been established that children are better grounded in learning when they are taught in their mother tongue. This has been researched into and proven right (Fafunwa, Macaulay; Osokoya, 1989; Ande, 1983). Unfortunately, this policy is not implemented particularly in the privately owned Nursery and Primary Schools. Even in the public schools, the teachers use bilingual medium of instruction (English and mother tongue).

In addition to the study of English language in Sweden’s Grundskola, other foreign languages that the children study include German, French, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Finnish, Spanish, and Chinese. In Nigeria it is only French that is another foreign language that is being studied in privately owned Nursery and Primary Schools but French is a compulsory subject at the Junior Secondary School.

Another initiative of the Grundskola curriculum content is the introduction of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This is principally being used as tools for teaching (Tommy Lagergren,

2000). It is on record that Sweden provides 60,000 teachers with multimedia computers and training programme using ICT in the classroom for about 40% of Sweden teachers improve internet access for schools. This no doubt would have created a greater variety in the work of teachers thereby transforming the learning environment of the school into more exciting workplaces for both teachers and children. Nigerian children are yet to experience and enjoy the benefits of ICT in the classroom, classroom environment, and the use of ICT as part of school paraphernalia is still far fetched. A national basic health scheme is still at the proposal stage and yet to be incorporated into the UBE scheme (Oduolowu, 2002). Whereas, these are already part and parcel of the Grundskola. In essence the result of Education for All (EFA) with the Grundskola was successful perhaps, based on some of the issues discussed while that of the Nigerian Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme proved abortive.

A Lesson for Nigeria and Some Other Countries

There is no doubt in the fact that the Nigerian Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme has a lot to gain from the Grundskola of Sweden. Some of the issues are directly or indirectly entrenched in policy guidelines contained in the implementation blueprint for the UBE scheme. Which if properly implemented will enhance the programme to yield better results. There is a programme of initiative for early child care and socialization for children below the statutory school age of six years in the UBE programme. However, the provision is neither compulsory nor free for children. As a result of this, only 47% of pre-school aged children benefit from the programme. Many factors hinder access to the programme. Such factors range from inability to pay to ill health of children (SAPA, 1993). The need to provide compulsory and free pre-school programme for these children, like is done in Sweden, cannot be over-emphasised. Among other things, it will establish a strong footing and provide uniformity of entry behaviour for all the children.

Often the argument of the huge financial implications is put forward. The provision could be limited to just one year prior to the statutory school year of the primary education. Another area, where benefit could be derived from Grundskola is in the pattern that Swedish children receive their compulsory education of 9 years in one and the same school. The benefit of this lies in that the monitoring and follow-up work on the learners is more effective. This no doubt could enhance productivity. This might not be easy to implement in the Nigerian setting i.e. to make children receive the nine year programme in the same school.

However, the principle of continuous close monitoring and supervision of the learning programme for a period of nine years cannot be underestimated. Even, with the Nigerian setting, there should be a follow-up or monitoring mechanism designed for these learners from primary school to the junior secondary level. These records could be kept by the various teachers. The information on each learner could be used to counsel and guide their development and progress. The goals of UBE should be broadened to have an international perspective. This will enable the children to see their own reality in a global context and be able to create international solidarity. They will be equipped with closer cross-cultural and cross border contracts like those of the Grundskola in Sweden. The demands of the 21st century have put a lot of pressure on the Nigerian children like all other children of the world. The Nigerian children can easily relate with these problems and from tender age proffer solutions to them. Thus, learning is made relevant to them.

Although the Nigerian primary education curriculum development is excellent, it is plagued with inefficiency. Ivowi (1999) asserted that it is overloaded, and that there are as many as sixteen subjects on the school time-table (SAPA, 1993). Ivowi doubted whether teachers can do justice to all of them or that six to eleven year old pupils can assimilate so much content. It is important therefore to review the curriculum – expunge irrelevant content and include new contents in line with global demands. In addition, programmes such as values education can be added. This could aim at combating perennial issues such as corruption, lack of patriotism, advanced free fraud and religious and ethnic clashes that the nation is facing. Learning from the Grundskola experience, interdisciplinary teaching and thematic studies should be promoted. This however, has implications for teacher preparation and in-service training. In-service and pre-service trainees

should be equipped with the skills of using these approaches. It will go a long way to solve to a great extent the problem of curriculum.

The provision of school health care is completely missing in the UBE programme and this is a very important component part of the Grundskola. It is pertinent to promote a holistic view of children by including nutrition, preventive health and encouraging healthy living. As it has been pointed out earlier on, many children do not attend school for reasons for ill-health (SAPA, 1993). It is therefore imperative to make provision for school health care even if it is only at the primary level. There should be school doctors who should carry out health checks and monitor children development and preserve and improve the physical and mental health of the children. There should also be school nurses who could be involved in elementary nursing. Like the Grundskola, the nutrition of children could be supplemented through provision of school meal for them. The meal could cater for the inadequacy in protein in-take of a majority of the Nigerian children.

For the Nigerian children to cope with the demands of the 21st century, the place of Information and Communication Technology cannot be over-emphasized. Too little work is been done in this area in Nigeria. Like the Grundskola, it is imperative to train and re-train teachers in ICT and other modern approaches of teaching. Interdisciplinary teaching and thematic studies if introduced into the school setting will solve most of the problems inhibiting the successful implementation of the curriculum demands. There is need to strengthen the regulatory roles of the various agencies responsible for the implementation of UBE. The Federal government needs to enact necessary legislation for the scheme, the state governments to initiate and execute specific projects for the local government to co-ordinate, supervise and monitor the implementation, local support and enabling environment for the execution of the scheme, voluntary agencies, non-governmental organizations and individuals to encourage and support increased enrolment, retention and completion by target groups in the programme of the scheme.

Summary and Conclusion

There is no doubt in the fact that the programme is expensive. UBE implies improved funding. Sufficient fund must be directed towards the magnitude of activities to realize the objectives. The available funds must be directed to areas that will make a difference such as school buildings, equipment, textbooks, teacher preparation, instructional materials etc. Above all, wasteful spending must be eliminated from the programme. The policy recommends a continuous evaluation of progress. The starting point of this evaluation is to compare existing practice with policy stipulations.

This will provide a framework for policy revision. Furthermore, in order to adequately respond to the changing needs of the society, it is necessary for the government to understand the existing practice as compared to national goals. If these are taken care of, the UBE programme in Nigeria will produce the desired outcome which is the true dream of the nation.

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